1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

return by themselves to their owners' houses, where they are given a feed of salt and powdered grain. Tethered animals are also fed with gathered leaves. Each animal has its name, which it knows; unless they wander into enclosed fields they are never beaten nor spoken to roughly. As you walk about Lingthem you come upon untended cattle in every direction; and one of the strangest sights is to watch the animals returning home of an evening. A herd of cattle, perhaps a score or more, will arrive in the centre of a group of houses, and will then each turn away to their own homes; as soon as they have settled under their houses they are given their evening feed. Stranger still is the fact that during the cold months—roughly from February to April—all the cattle, except the milch-cows, are sent in an untended group into the forest up the hill behind the village. When people want their cattle back they go up the hill to the place where they are liable to congregate, or, as the Lepchas put it 'where the cattle live in the forest', usually under some noticeably big tree. Within twenty-four hours cattle which have been completely untended for four months can be collected and brought back. While the cattle are in the forest a State tax of two annas a head a month is charged.

The taming of animals so completely is a remarkable feat in itself, and is also a good symbol of the Lepchas' chief attitudes; I think it has also an important bearing on their psychological development. In neighbouring tribes herding cattle is one of the major occupations of growing boys; in this way they achieve a certain self-reliance and learn to exercise their judgement. This discipline is almost completely absent for Lepcha boys; only when predatory animals are known or suspected to be in the neighbourhood are they set to watch animals. All through his childhood and adolescence the Lepcha boy is under the supervision of, and usually in company with his elders; and I feel sure that the lack of self-reliance, the inability to stand alone, which is one of the most obvious characteristics of the young Lepcha man, is enhanced by the lack of any work specially given over to children.

The size of the herds varies very considerably. The average is about six or seven head; a few households have considerably more and some people have only one or two, or even none at all.

Goats are raised exclusively for food and sacrifice and are never milked; they are not highly esteemed and people usually only

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

ii

The office of Mandal is hereditary, within the Lepcha meaning of the term; that is to say that the title resides in the extended family, and when the holder dies or becomes feeble through old age, it is given to the next most suitable male in the family; it often is the holder's eldest son, but may equally well be a younger brother or nephew of the holder. The position is probably older than the Tibetan colonisation of Sikkim, for some of the Mandals of Zongu are the eleventh or twelth of the family line to hold the position. In Lingthem Chala Mandal, the present holder of the title, is the third of his line to hold office; he has been Mandal for twenty years, succeeding his father's younger brother Tasso Nungyen, who in his turn had succeeded his own eldest brother Ogen. Before Ogen the office had been in old Serving's family; but Serving's father Pépo was exceedingly stupid and the only other suitable member of the family was already a lama attached to Talung monastery; therefore the title was taken from his line (the Tsel-telim *ptso*) and transferred to Chala Mandal's (Jam-yong *ptso*). The Tsel-telim *ptso* was originally by far the most powerful in the neighbourhood, but is now almost extinct, owing, it is said, to the *tamtoom* resulting from one ancestor who sold Lepchas as slaves to the Bhutanese. 622

The Mandal is normally spoken of as the 'landlord' of the village, and the other householders are called his 'tenants.' The Mandal holds the land under the Maharajah, who is the ultimate owner; the householders have the usufruct of the land but cannot transfer it outside their family without the Mandal's consent; for land to be transferred to a stranger from outside the village the permission of the Court is also necessary. The Mandal is responsible to the Court for the maintenance of good order in the village and for the collection of taxes; if there is a deficit he is liable to have to make it up. In relation to the other villagers he stands in the position of an elder relative—father or uncle or elder brother; he arranges the marriages of most of the young people, he looks after everybody's welfare and happiness, giving advice on personal or agricultural matters where they appear needed, and acting as intermediary between the villagers and the Court. It is necessary for the Mandal to be slightly richer than his 'tenants'; he has to entertain all distinguished visitors; he has to look after the orphaned and homeless (Chala Mandal had permanently living in [423] [651] [584] [574] 622 736

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

624 and Itup the son of Takneum *youmi*. There is also a *gyapön* in Panung and one in Liklyang.

iii

[622] The objects of the four above-named offices are twofold; the regulation of intra-village affairs and the collection of taxes for the State. Within the village crime has to be prevented and possibly punished, quarrels stopped, and the poor and needy helped.

● 651 There is a fixed tax of Rs. 5 a year on each house, a small tax on certain grain seeds which are sown for crops and a sales tax on the cardamum fruit, which is regulated according to the price fetched and automatically deducted at selling.[5] The total tax payable by the fifty houses under Chala Mandal's jurisdiction is Rs. 3500, averaging Rs. 70[6] per household. The money is collected by the *gyapön* and taken by the Mandal to Gangtok. Although the payment of the taxes is somewhat resented, especially by the older men, it does not seem to me to bear hardly on the Lepchas. Both money and the cash-producing crop of cardamum were introduced together at the beginning of this century—formerly taxes were paid in kind—and everybody grows more than sufficient cardamum to pay their taxes. There are nevertheless some arrears of taxes in Lingthem; indeed a couple of households are seven years in arrear, and that not through poverty but through fecklessness. So feckless are they that the Mandal has threatened that if they do not pay by the next year he will refuse to be responsible for them, in which case they will be summoned to the chief Court in Gangtok. Generally

[5] The actual taxes on seed are as follows:—

Wet rice	Rs. -/8. on 8 lbs.
Millet and maize	Rs. -/12 on 8 lbs.
Dry rice	Rs. 1/- on 32 lbs.

Other crops are not taxed. The tax on cardamum is graduated according to the selling price per maund of 80 lbs.

If the maund fetches	Rs. 10/-	the tax is	Rs. -/14
" " "	Rs. 20/-	"	Rs. 1/8
" " "	Rs. 40/-	"	Rs. 2/8.

This tax has recently been reduced. Formerly it was at Rs. 2/8 at under Rs. 20, and Rs. 5/- over that sum. The 1936 price of cardamum was Rs. 12/- a maund. There is also a small tax, not very efficiently collected, on animals pastured in, or produce gathered from the forest.

[6] About £; 7 0 or 26 dollars.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

the Mandal makes up outstanding debts as far as he can out of his own property.

If through misfortune or poverty a man falls behind with his taxes the Mandal will advise him to collect materials for a feast. At this feast, called *hloang-ʒok*, the guests will contribute presents of money according to their ability, the money contributed being considered as an absolute gift, and not as a loan. In the last three years three people have thus been cleared of debt by voluntary contributions.

Actual crime takes up very little time. The only generally authenticated murder in the neighbourhood took place two centuries ago; but there are fairly constant rumours and suspicions of poisoning, and at least one instance of suspected foul play[7] which have to be cleared up.

In Lingthem an old widowed nun, Hlatam, the mother of Aga, is generally believed to possess a mysterious slow-acting 'poison,' which either she, or one of her ancestors, is said to have obtained from the Plains people. So strong was this suspicion that twenty years ago the Mandal had her seized while she was working in the fields; she was brought to the monastery where she was given a complete body search by some women, while the *youmi* and *gyapōn* ransacked her house: no trace of any poison was found, and after the accusation she prayed in the monastery, calling on the Gods to kill her if she possessed any poison.

Nevertheless the majority of the people of Lingthem still believe that she possesses poison. Chala Mandal says it is both a folly and a sin to call her a poisoner; there is no evidence of her murderous activities, there would be no advantage in her pursuing them and anyhow, where could she obtain the poison? Jiroong and one or two others agree with the Mandal, but the great majority take up the attitude that there is no smoke without fire, and some implicitly believe in her poisoning and are too frightened to take food or drink from her hands. Thus the lama Tafoor says that when he has to go to her house for a ceremony he makes it quite clear that he has come as a priest, and tells her that if he is ill subsequently everybody will know who to blame. Kurma believed that his second wife and her father were both killed by Hlatam; both died of stomach trouble which started almost immediately after receiving food from her, though death did not ensue till some months later.

This poison is considered to have partially natural and partially

[7] See Book Three. Chapter Fifteen pp. 402–403.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Up towards the mountains there is a big cliff on which 614
many monkeys used to live. Below it was a limpid pool, in 773
which a young girl was in the habit of bathing. One day, when she was leaving the water, a monkey came down to her and the two lay together. In due course a child was born and this was the first member of the Sungvel clan. Now the land in these parts belonged to some Tibetans, seven of whom came one day to gather honey. When they saw how steep the place was they realised that they could never climb it, so they asked Sungvel, who by then had a son of his own, to climb it for them. Sungvel told the seven Tibetans to sit in a row by the pool, since if they came nearer they would be stung by the bees. He and his son then climbed the cliff. They tied their ankles together so as to get a better hold on the smooth rock-face, and by mounting on one another's shoulders managed to reach the place where the honey was. The son tore it out with his hands and threw it down. As soon as the bees saw what was happening they swarmed out and started to attack the seven men who were sitting below. They were stung so badly that the pain was unendurable: the only thing to do was to jump into the water, and so they were all drowned. After this Sungvel and his son took possession of the land, but the clan is now extinct.

I have already said that the Lepchas have neither tribal 636
nor clan organisation; but in order to regulate their dealings with the state certain officials have been appointed. Firstly, there is the *Mukhtiyar*, who deals direct with the Maharaja's agent in Gangtok. This is a comparatively new office, the present holder being only the third in succession.

There is but one Mukhtiyar for the whole of Jongu, and his 636
duty is to supervise and co-ordinate the work of the separate 622
village *Mandals* or headmen. The Mandals collect taxes in 651
their respective villages and go once every year with the actual cash to Gangtok: but since most of them are completely illiterate they deliver their accounts verbally to the Mukhtiyar, who records them in writing. The Mukhtiyar 636
receives no pay but is entitled to a commission of four annas a year for each house on which taxes are paid. He tours all

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

would otherwise ensue during his absence on state business.

Every Mandal has under him several assistants known as *Karbari*. The number of these is not fixed and is at the discretion of individual headmen. Karbaris are appointed for a period of three years, and with the exception of Lamas everyone takes on the duty in turn. The roster goes on indefinitely, so that if any particular man is not called upon during his own lifetime the turn devolves upon his son. There is no pay nor any other material advantage in the office of Karbari, but it is not unpopular, since it gives the holder a certain amount of authority.

When a man has retired from the office of Karbari he is eligible for the appointment of *Youmi*. At present time there are four Youmis in Lingtem. Whenever any matter crops up which can only be decided by reference to customary law the Mandal calls in the Youmis to aid him in giving a decision. They are usually very old men, and because of this they can decide such matters as whether there is any reason why a particular couple should not be married: or if one man runs off with the wife of another what compensation he should be required to pay, and so on. The word *Youmi* does not appear in the dictionary and I do not know what it means. I believe, however, that the office may be a survival of tribal administration. It is not known in other parts of Sikkim.

There is no *per capita* tax in Sikkim but every house pays five rupees a year. In addition to this there is a tax of one rupee for each sixteen pounds of dry rice sown, and the same for maize. Rice grown wet, in terraced fields (a recent innovation), is taxed at eight annas for eight pounds of seed, but barley, buckwheat, and wheat are free. The economics of Lingtem, and indeed of most parts of Sikkim, are now based upon the cardamom, the sale of which is a state monopoly. The market price of cardamoms fluctuates from year to year, and for this reason the tax is adjusted to a sliding scale. When the rate is ten rupees a maund (approximately eighty pounds) the cultivator pays a tax of fourteen annas a maund; one and a half rupees when the

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

651 market rate is twenty, and two and a half when it rises to
655 forty rupees. The right to buy cardamoms throughout the state has been sold to certain specified contractors, who are responsible for collecting the above tax and handing it over as a lump sum to the Durbar office. The weighing of the crops is done in the presence of representatives of the state; but even so the system results in considerable hardship to the peasant. As is usually the case the man who does the work sees little of the profit. This question, however, will be discussed when we come to consider the question of debt.

651 When cattle are grazed in the forest their owners pay a tax
231 of two annas a month for each animal. Most of the oxen not required for ploughing remain up in the forest from February until about the middle of June. They are left entirely unattended and never stray. I have travelled a great deal in various parts of the Himalaya but in no other place have I seen cattle roaming about completely unattended. It was a most extraordinary sight to see them going out to graze in the mornings completely alone, returning again in the evening, and always in the same order. It is a common sight all over India to see small children out with the cattle or driving a flock of goats along the road. It is in many ways a good thing
[857] and gives the child a sense of responsibility. But in Jongu one never sees it, and the children hang about in the fields all day or play around the house. The only time that cattle are watched is when it is known that a predatory animal is about. At such times a small boy will usually stay by them.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

But the settled areas of British India have an expensive British administration, for which, in the last instance, the peasant has to pay. This is not to deny, of course, that he gets certain benefits in return: good roads, schools, hospitals, and so on; but these are of more use to people who have already reached the higher economic levels. In the meantime the small tenant cultivator is forced to sell his own rice in order to pay his taxes, not to mention expensive litigation, which seems to increase steadily as conditions become ever more "settled." It seems all wrong to me.

* * * * *

Both men and women work in the fields, and there is no hard-and-fast division of labour between the sexes, although the heavier work is done mostly by men. Woman, as such, is an inferior being, but only because the Lamaist doctrine says so. "Even Buddhist nuns, excepting the very few so-called incarnations of celestial Bodhisats, are given an inferior position scarcely higher than lay devotees"; and to be born as a woman is a definite step backwards in the march towards Nirvana, the freedom from reincarnation, which is the goal of all true Buddhists. But this idea is completely foreign to the Lepcha, who does not recognise any inherent distinction between the temperament of the sexes; there is with them practically no such thing as "men's work" and "women's work."

Dr. Margaret Mead was the first to point out that the personalities of the two sexes are socially produced. Two of the tribes she studied in New Guinea had "no idea that men and women are different in temperament. They allow them different economic and religious rôles, different skills, different vulnerabilities to evil, magic and supernatural influences. The Arapesh believe that painting in colour is appropriate only to men, and the Mundugumor consider fishing an essentially feminine task. But any idea that temperamental traits of the order of dominance, bravery, aggressiveness, objectivity, malleability are inalienably

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER 13

Economics

MOST books dealing with primitive peoples contain at least one depressing chapter on the evils resulting from European contact, either through missionaries, education, or trading; but in this particular case the British Government, which has indeed made far too many mistakes in India, can be held completely blameless, in view of the fact that Sikkim is an independent state; and although one or two missionaries have been allowed to work in the country they have so far not been permitted to carry on their activities in Jongu. But every piece must have its villain, and in Jongu he is the local money-lender.

Although the people are very lightly taxed, the provision of the actual cash necessary for this purpose has introduced a complicating factor, for prior to the introduction of direct taxation the Lepchas depended entirely upon barter for such few of their needs as they could not themselves produce. Indeed, they still use only this system in dealings among themselves. Suppose, for instance, that a man has a surplus of grain at the end of the season. He does not sell it, but either makes it into *chi* or loans it to some fellow-villager who may be short of food. If the borrower repays the loan within one year no interest is charged: otherwise fifty per cent is added to the principal when the loan is repaid—in kind, of course. In return for the use of plough oxen it is usual to give the lender eight pounds of grain per day; but if a bullock is required for a sacrifice or ceremony it is usual to repay the loan in kind. If this cannot be done for some considerable time the borrower usually takes a chicken and some *chi* to the lender, but apart from this no interest is charged.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

whether they should get warm woollen clothes, or have to put up with shoddy cotton. I should like to think that at least the Tibetan farmer made something out of the transaction; but he, too, is in the hands of the Indian money-lenders in Kalimpong, caught in the intricacies of a vicious circle. The remedy is, of course, obvious; but in present circumstances almost impossible of attainment.

Cardamoms are a State monopoly, and the right to trade in them has been sold to the official State Bankers, an outside concern which, in its turn, also controls all the money-lenders in the State. This is a convenient arrangement for the authorities and saves the provision of numerous extra officials; but even if the State itself assumed control of the business there would be no means of ensuring that the peasants were not cheated, petty (and usually underpaid) officials being much the same all over the East. Under the present system of taxation the people must obviously grow cardamoms, as in no other way can they raise the necessary cash with which to pay their taxes: and from a theoretical point of view their cultivation is a source of extra profit. Indeed, this actually is the case in many parts of Sikkim, where the people are more sophisticated, and better able to safeguard their own interests. There is no doubt that when the Maharaja's predecessors introduced this plant into Sikkim they did so with the motive of improving the people's economic condition; but in those days no one could be expected to foresee the disastrous effects of introducing uncontrolled monetary trading into an illiterate community, organised on socialist lines, which previously had no need of actual cash. As it is, cardamoms are a perfect curse in Jongu.